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PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0460/01 0430209
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 120209Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9555
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 000460

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/11/2017

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SUBJECT: SUNNI HEWAR BLOC REP HOLDS THE FORT, TAKES ON BLOC
LEADERS AND ABSENTEEISM

Classified By: Deputy Political Counselor Charles O. Blaha,
for reasons 1.4 (b) (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Kirkuk native and Sunni Hewan bloc CoR member Mohammed Tamimi has never missed a session of Iraq's Council of Representatives (CoR). The rest of Hewan's attendance at the CoR is sparse at best; remaining bloc members shuttle back and forth between Amman and Baghdad. Bloc leader Saleh Al-Motluq, who is resident in Dubai and Amman, attended a handful of sessions at the start of the legislative term but now claims he is on an "Iranian hit list" and says he will not return until security improves. Tamimi is the bloc's de facto representative at the CoR; he speaks for Motluq and updates him daily. While he is not vocal on the CoR floor and relatively silent in the media, Tamimi, a former law professor, is a member of the Constitutional Review Committee, the CoR Integrity committee, and is often in the CoR cafeteria in discussions with members of all blocs. He labels himself and Hewan secular "troublemakers" and challenges the idea that a handful of bloc leaders are authorized to make decisions for the entire CoR. Tamimi's biggest frustration is CoR member absenteeism. He claimed he already has 55 signatures for "member replacement law" that would allow parties to replace members - including bloc leaders - who miss 15 sessions starting from the next legislative term, End Summary.

WHERE IS SALEH AL MOTLUQ?

¶2. (C) Tamimi acknowledges that Hewan bloc leader Saleh Motluq's absence from Iraq is problematic. However, although he frequently makes critical media statements, Tamimi said the real reason Motluq is not in Iraq is because Hewan has evidence he is a target of Iran and would be assassinated if he returned. All Hewan members actively discourage Motluq from returning to Iraq. Tamimi said he speaks to Motluq nearly every day, updates him on political developments, and is fully authorized to act on Motluq's behalf at the CoR. In fact, he recently authorized the CoR to remove Motluq as the Agricultural Committee chair and replace him with Mahmoud Azzai, a Hewan member who regularly attends CoR sessions. Motluq traveled to Europe along with a number of Sunni Tawafuq bloc CoR members for meetings, and he represented Hewan during the delegation's visit the EU Parliament. He said that Motluq's general assessment of the GOI was "while he hopes it will succeed for the good of Iraq, he expects this entire government, with the way it is structured, to fail."

THE REST OF HEWAR: IN AND OUT OF IRAQ

¶3. (C) Of his fellow Hewan members, who infrequently attend the CoR, Tamimi said that businessman Ali Sajri is currently in Amman and has no intention of participation at the CoR.

Tamimi chastised Sajri for using his CoR membership to get a diplomatic passport and parliamentary immunity from criminal prosecution, and to lend legitimacy to his frequent media commentary. Tamimi he dislikes politicians who use the media as their podium. Tamimi said that CoR member Asad Ibrahim Al-Farhan stopped attending sessions when Al Qaeda in Iraq threatened to kill his nine brothers. However, Al-Farhan has been working the past few months to get his family out of Iraq and plans to return to the CoR in March. He said Hewan member Mohammad al-Daeni, who used to attend sessions frequently during the first two months, also rarely comes. However Daeni recently appeared on Al-Jazeera airing images of women and children he claimed were tortured at Ministry of Interior facilities under former Interior Minister Bayan Jabr. This caused Shiite Itilaf bloc leader Jalal Eddin Al-Sagheer to call for lifting Daeni's immunity and prosecuting him under anti-terrorism legislation. Tamimi characterized Daeni's actions "extreme", but said Daeni felt he had to be heard.

¶4. (C) According to Tamimi, Mustafa al-Heti and Nada Mohammed come and go for a week at a time because their families are in Amman. He said Mohammad Hussein Awad came for four months until he got sick. Tamimi said when Awad returned after his illness, two of his PSD members were killed, but he expects Awad to return in March. Tamimi said that Faleh Hassan Zeydan, Amr Khalaf Jawad and Mohmoud Azzawi all come with some regularity.

STRUGGLING TO BE HEARD

¶5. (C) Tamimi expressed frustration at being a minority voice

BAGHDAD 00000460 002 OF 002

in a parliament dominated by large, Islamist blocs. Tamimi pushed for Hewan to have a seat on the Policy Council for National Security but said Hewan was not allowed a seat because the bloc has no ministers in the cabinet. He pointed out that the by-laws of the constitution do not define what is considered a bloc, saying this is a problem. Tamimi, however, was successful at securing Hewan a seat in the Constitutional Review Political Issues Committee, despite initial opposition from larger bloc leaders.

¶6. (C) Tamimi characterized Hewan as a small bloc known as a troublemaker in the CoR. Tamimi, a secularist, does not hesitate to challenge the leaders of the largest blocs in the CoR (Sunni Tawafuq, Shiite Itilaf, and the Kurdistan Alliance. However, he prefers to work by building relationships with fellow members through backroom negotiations. When major bloc leaders this week presented him with the results of their budget negotiations as a fait accompli, he told them, "You do not speak for me" and is working on getting signatories for a petition that supports his view. Nevertheless, Tamimi says he tries to be careful not to burn bridges, recognizing he needs to maintain good relationships for the future. He recounted that he recently had worked successfully with hardline SCIRI member Jalal al-Din al-Saghir.

¶7. (C) Tamimi, a lawyer by training, believes the constitution is filled with landmines. He said the document is too flexible, like the American and British constitutions, and said it should be stricter and less open to interpretation, like the French constitution. Tamimi is on the Constitutional Review Committee, but says he has a weak voice in it. He says he and Salim Jabbouri, a lawyer from Tawafuq, wrote a joint paper outlining significant recommendations for changes.

TAKING ON ABSENTEEISM

¶8. (C) Tamimi said he is proposing a "members replacements law" to address the problem of absentees. The law would stipulate that, starting from the next legislative term, CoR members who miss 15 sessions or more could be replaced by their party. Tamimi said he already has 55 signatures in support of the law, fifty of whom are Shiite Itilaf members. He complained he has never seen many CoR members and said many are former ministers who already have a pension and thus no incentive to come to work. When reminded that Motluq has missed more than 15 sessions, Tamimi was adamant that the law would be applied equally, even to CoR bloc leaders.

BIO NOTES

¶9. (C) Tamimi was a law professor at Kirkuk University for six years and was elected the university's president during the Coalition Provisional Authority era. However, he says the Education Minister in the Iraqi Transitional Government, an Iraqi Islamic Party member, dismissed him for political reasons. In addition to law, Tamimi has a degree in international relations, specializing in Saudi Arabian-American relations, and a degree in political psychology. He said he is still involved in academics and noted he currently is working on a paper for an assistant professorship entitled "Saudi Arabian political parties from 1992-2002." He also said he was trained as a diplomat, although he only stayed in the diplomatic corps for one month. He is interested in constitutional and international law.

¶10. (C) Tamimi joined the National Dialogue Council in 2004, before Hewan split from the group. He was number two on the Hewan list in Kirkuk in the December 2005 election. He was not expecting to win a seat, saying that the election results were announced four days before he planned to leave to study at the Sorbonne in Paris. Tamimi married in 1992 at age 17 and has four children, two girls and two boys, ranging from age thirteen to nine. His family used to live in Hawija, but they moved to a village in a small village just outside Kirkuk for security reasons. He said he had not seen his family in three months and knew that their living conditions in the village were difficult. He said appreciated the sacrifice they were making so he could attend CoR sessions. He is a smoker and does not speak English. Tamimi is a frank, open, knowledgeable interlocutor. He appears to be good friends with fellow outspoken CoR "troublemaker" Hussein Falluji. Tamimi is someone to watch in the CoR.
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